

Slaughter Pushes for Progress on Lewiston-Queenston and Peace Bridges

Rochester, NY – Congresswoman Louise Slaughter (NY-28) today wrote to President Obama asking him to discuss the future of the Lewiston-Queenston and Peace Bridges ahead of his meeting with Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper tomorrow. Noting that the United States and Canada share both the longest undefended border as well as the largest bilateral trade relationship in the world, she argued that the Lewiston-Queenston Bridge is in desperate need of funding while the U.S and Canada should again consider sharing security responsibilities at Buffalo's Peace Bridge.

“In Western New York we are acutely aware of the need to strengthen our border security while maintaining a free flow of goods across the border and a strong economic relationship. I ask for your help to invest in the Lewiston plaza reconstruction so that we can grow trade and expand our economic opportunities,” Slaughter wrote to Obama.

In regard to the Peace Bridge, Slaughter said, “As you review our shared border security and look at ways to integrate our security resources I ask that you consider land pre-clearance and Shared Border Management.”

Slaughter has been the leading advocate for high-speed rail construction that would stretch across Upstate New York and today also asked Obama to speak with Harper about the development of high-speed passenger rail that would connect Niagara Falls, NY to Plattsburg through Niagara Falls, Ontario, Toronto and Montreal. With the development of rail across Upstate New York and into Canada, trade would increase trade between the two nations and improve the economy of cities in New York, Ontario and Quebec.

Slaughter wrote, “High-Speed Rail between the U.S. and Canada is critical to the economic development of the region. It will act as an international gateway tying together knowledge hubs like Montreal, Toronto and New York City with the skilled and talented labor of Buffalo, Rochester and Niagara Falls. Investing now would also create

much needed jobs for thousands of workers throughout New York. According to the Capital District Transportation Authority, high-speed rail will bring 12,000 new jobs to New York State.”

A copy of her letter is below.

February 3, 2011

President Barack Obama

The White House

1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW

Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama:

I am pleased to hear that you will be meeting with Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper on Friday, February 4, 2011. The United State and Canada share the longest border between two countries as well as the largest bilateral trade relationship in the world. It is critical to our economic and national security interests that we maintain a close and productive relationship with Canada.

It is my understanding that among the topics that you will discuss with the Prime Minister is authorizing a comprehensive shared review of border security. In Western New York we are acutely aware of the need to strengthen our border security while maintaining a free flow of goods across the border and a strong economic relationship.

Key pillars in the U.S.-Canada relationship are the Lewiston-Queenston Bridge in Niagara County, NY and the Peace Bridge in Buffalo, NY. The Peace Bridge serves as the second busiest passenger vehicle crossing and third busiest commercial crossing on our shared border. The Peace Bridge carries \$20 billion of trade annually between the United States and Canada. Yet congestion related to infrastructure constraints and customs processes has been a serious problem since the mid 1990s, and has worsened since September 11, 2001. The economic ramifications of congestion and new customs rules cannot be overstated; the Ontario Chamber of Commerce estimates that border delays are costing the US and Canadian economies over CDN \$13.6 billion annually.

In December 2001, in order to address the emerging security and traffic issues arising from 9/11, Canada and the United States agreed to the Smart Border Declaration. The Declaration's aim is to enhance the security of the US-Canada border, while facilitating the flow of low-risk people and goods. Under that Declaration, the two governments agreed on December 17, 2004 to issue a framework to put land pre-clearance in place at the Peace Bridge. The pre-clearance pilot, called Shared Border Management (SBM) would involve the relocation of all United States primary and secondary border operations for both commercial and passenger traffic from Buffalo, NY to Fort Erie, Canada. A reciprocal relationship would take place in Alexandria Bay, NY, the 10th busiest crossing along our Northern Border.

Unfortunately, negotiations for SBM were cut off by then Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff, and they have not been re-opened. I believe that SBM, or an alternative land pre-clearance program on the northern border would make infinite sense at the Peace Bridge, and would provide a way to successfully integrate our border security with Canada's. At the Peace Bridge a land pre-clearance program would allow for the long-delayed Peace Bridge Expansion Project to move forward without the construction of a \$230 million security plaza on the U.S. side of the border, saving considerable construction costs. At a minimum the U.S. should work to establish a pre-processing capability for commercial vehicles which would provide a safe way to immediately alleviate chronic congestion experienced at the border crossing each day. As you review our shared border security and look at ways to integrate our security resources I ask that you consider land pre-clearance and SBM.

In addition to land pre-clearance, I request your attention to the required reconstruction of the Lewiston-Queenston Bridge U.S. Plaza at the Lewiston, New York Land Port of Entry (LPOE). The outdated U.S. Plaza was built in the 1960s and by U.S. Customs and Border Protection's (CBP) own estimate the plaza facilities fail to meet CBP's safety and operational requirements in this post-9/11 era. The obsolete plaza facilities also create a bottleneck, hampering the efficient flow of trade over the Lewiston-Queenston Bridge which is the fourth-busiest

U.S.-Canadian commercial land border crossing. Over \$26 billion in trade passes each year through the Niagara Frontier with the Lewiston-Queenston Bridge accounting for over 44% of the commercial traffic. Together with the Whirlpool Rapids and Rainbow Bridges, these bridges accommodate roughly 6.4 million vehicles each year between the United States and Canada and an estimated half million Canadian and American jobs depend on the exports that cross these bridges.

While the Canadian Government has contributed \$78 million to modernize its Queenston Plaza with state-of-the-art inspection facilities and ten automobile and five truck inspection lanes to safely expedite commerce, the U.S. plaza in Lewiston still only has six car lanes, four truck lanes, and outdated and inefficient CBP inspection facilities. I have held meetings and met with CBP and the Niagara Falls Bridge Commission (NFBC) to push for the funding of this important project. The NFBC is not looking for a handout and is willing to contribute to fund the requirement renovations. Considering the billions in trade and hundreds of thousands of jobs that rely on an efficient flow of commerce over the Lewiston-Queenston Bridge, federal support for this project is critical and in our long-term economic interests. I ask for your help to invest in the Lewiston plaza reconstruction so that we can grow trade and expand our economic opportunities.

Finally, High-Speed Rail (HSR) between the U.S. and Canada is critical to the economic development of the region. HSR will act as an international gateway tying together knowledge hubs like Montreal, Toronto and New York City with the skilled and talented labor of Buffalo, Rochester and Niagara Falls. Investing now would also create much needed jobs for thousands of workers throughout New York. According to the Capital District Transportation Authority, high-speed rail will bring 12,000 new jobs to New York State.

In Upstate New York alone, 3,500 workers are employed by 30 companies that manufacture railroad equipment. Together these companies bring in more than \$750 million in annual sales. Another 11,000 Upstate workers are employed by businesses that produce and distribute goods to sectors that are heavily relied upon by the railroad industry. High speed rail will not only benefit travelers, but the thousands of employees who will build our high speed rail network.

These issues are critical to protecting our shared national security interests, while facilitating trade and commerce across the border and limiting adverse effects on local communities. I hope that you give them strong consideration as you continue to work with Prime Minister Harper and the Canadian government on strengthening our border security and our unique economic relationship.

Sincerely,

Louise M. Slaughter

Member of Congress